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Grindrod's Centenary Sermon
1839

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WESLEYAN METHODISM VIEWED IN
RETROSPECT.

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CITY-ROAD CHAPEL, LONDON,

ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1839,

AT THE

RELIGIOUS CELEBRATION OF THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE UNITED
SOCIETIES OF THE PEOPLE CALLED METHODISTS.

BY EDMUND GRINDROD.

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A SERMON,

&c.

“ACCORDING to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!” (Numbers xxiii. 23.)

THE words which I have read as the motto of my intended discourse, were uttered by Balaam, when, in the “visions of the Almighty,” he was led into sublime contemplations of the marvellous acts of divine Providence, illustrated in the deliverance and preservation of the ancient Israelites. They were now on their journey to the promised land; and, without any hostile purposes towards the inhabitants of the country, they had pitched their tents in the plains of Moab. The greatness of their numbers, and the success of their arms, in the defensive wars which they had waged with neighbouring states, alarmed the king of Moab, who hastily adopted the best measures which his policy could suggest to secure himself, and destroy the objects of his causeless dread. Having called to his councils the princes of Midian, who were his neighbours and allies, he dispatched messengers to the son of Beor, who dwelt a little beyond the boundaries of his kingdom, on the banks of the river Euphrates, “saying, Behold, there is

a people come out from Egypt, who cover the face of the earth, and abide over against me : come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people ; for they are too mighty for me : peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and drive them out of the land : for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." All Gentile nations have held the opinion, that persons bearing a sacred character, whether that of prophet, priest, or diviner, possess a power to send plagues and death amongst those on whom they are pleased to pronounce their maledictions. To Balaam's imagined control over the ministers of divine vengeance, Moab trusted for success, more than to the wisdom of his councils, or the strength of his armies. Viewed under the most favourable aspect, the character of Balaam is very equivocal. He was a worshipper of the God of Israel, invested with a prophetic commission, and on some occasions exercised miraculous powers ; but he loved the wages of unrighteousness. Allured by Balak's promises of honour and wealth, he set himself in opposition to the known will of God ; obeyed the summons to the court of that evil-minded prince ; made himself a party to his wicked designs ; and, by religious rites and sacrificial offerings, sought to bring the blast of heaven upon a company of unoffending strangers, who were peaceably journeying through the country, to a land which God had promised them. All his efforts failed ; every communication which he received from the Spirit of inspiration contained blessings upon those on whom his curses were invoked ; and he was made the unwilling instrument of informing the king, that he had received a commandment to bless whom he sought to curse. " God hath blessed them," said he, " and I cannot reverse it." In the words immediately connected with the text, he breaks out in strains of rapture, declaring to Balak and his nobles, that all their impious machinations were in

vain against a people whom Jehovah had determined to defend: "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel. According to this time" (or, "from this time forward") "it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" As if he had said, "How wonderful and glorious are those works which God is about to accomplish for them! They are such as will afford matter of discourse and admiration through all succeeding ages!"

Let this inspired story remind us, that He who ruleth in the kingdoms of men is the church's unchangeable Friend. Of his spiritual Israel it may always with truth be said, "The Lord their God is with them, and the shout of a King is among them." He will defeat the deepest counsels, frustrate the most ingenious plans of their enemies, and cause their angry curses to recoil upon their own heads; and, in the review of his providential interpositions, his servants will often find occasion triumphantly to exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" But the displays of his gracious energy in the salvation of the souls of men demand our liveliest gratitude. When, by the faithful preaching of the gospel, multitudes of careless sinners are awakened to serious concern for their eternal welfare; abandon the practice of iniquity; flee to the Saviour of the world for the remission of sin, and deliverance from the wrath to come; are reconciled to God by the blood of the cross; made new creatures in Christ Jesus;—when open profligates, whose lives were a scourge to their families, and a calamity to the surrounding neighbourhood, are converted from the error of their ways, added to the fellowship of the saints, and become examples of every Christian virtue;—we may well exclaim, with joyful astonishment and devout thanksgiving, "What hath God wrought!" Such a work of grace is that, the Centenary of which we are assembled this day

religiously to celebrate. May He to whom we ascribe all the glory, accept our grateful tribute.

Whoever, with an unprejudiced mind, examines the history of Wesleyan Methodism, must be convinced; that it records a very remarkable revival of pure Christianity; such as, for its depth, extent, and permanency, has not been surpassed, except in the primitive, apostolic times. A century has now elapsed since our first little society was established in this great metropolis; and, notwithstanding the formidable opposition with which we have been assailed, by rude and persecuting mobs, in the earlier periods of our existence, and by literary antagonists in every period; besides the numerous secessions of large masses of people from our communion; by the good hand of God upon us, we have risen to be, in point of number and influence, one of the most important denominations of evangelical Protestants in the whole world.

When it pleased God to raise up those eminent men whom he honoured to be the chief instruments of this revival, spiritual religion had fallen into general decay, and seemed to be hastening to utter extinction in these lands: the solitary good men of those times hung their harps upon the willows, sat down in their closets, mourned over the deep degeneracy of the age in which it was their lot to live, and pleaded with God to spare a guilty nation from merited and apprehended judgment. No mean portion of the literature of the day was enlisted on the side of infidelity; the clergy of the established church, to a fearful extent, had abandoned that awakening, useful, and evangelical style of preaching which their predecessors of a former age so successfully practised; the ministry of the Dissenters, with a few honourable exceptions, was characterized by a total absence of the vital truths of the gospel, and the accompanying unction of the Holy Ghost; and destructive ignorance of divine things prevailed through the length and

breadth of this Protestant country. In the higher orders of society it had become fashionable to treat religion as a subject of merriment and ridicule, and among all classes a fearful disregard of God and his laws was manifest; the sabbath was shamefully desecrated in the rural, as well as the manufacturing, districts; public worship was neglected, and immorality everywhere abounded.

To stem this sweeping torrent of vice and irreligion, and to revive the decayed piety of the British churches, by singular dispensations of his providence and grace, God raised up the fathers of our Connexion, and others of a similar spirit belonging to different communities; and there was in these revered men a striking adaptation to the great work to which they were divinely called. The elder Wesley, whom we distinctively own, under God, as the Founder of our societies, was a scholar of profound and extensive learning, possessed of a correct and comprehensive knowledge of the whole system of Christian theology; pre-eminently fitted by gifts of nature and grace for the government and direction of that great religious body of which God constituted him the spiritual ruler and head; and exemplifying through the whole of his busy, laborious, useful, and protracted life, that deep and exalted piety which rendered him a pattern worthy the imitation of his numerous spiritual children. His younger brother, Charles, was for many years his ablest coadjutor; in his early career, and as long as his health would admit, he was an indefatigable, zealous, awakening, and successful Preacher; the fruit of his ministry was found for many days in almost all parts of Great Britain, and in not a few places in Ireland. He was endowed with fine talents; especially, as is well known, in sacred poetry; and, by the blessing of God, he has supplied our great community with a collection of hymns, which, for beauty of style and sentiment, correctness of taste, soundness of divinity, depth and variety of experimental and prac-



tical piety, have never been exceeded by any human compositions.

To these eminent and apostolic men, God raised up many sons in the gospel, evangelists, who, though much inferior to their leaders in learning and general information, were singularly fitted for those plans of revival and usefulness which the Wesleys were providentially led to adopt. "The early Methodist preachers were a race of devout men ; full of faith and of the Holy Ghost ; they lived in the Spirit, walked in the Spirit, and were the epistles of Jesus Christ known and read of all men. They were continually employed in their Master's work ; in the parlour, on their journeys, in the streets and lanes of our cities and towns, in highways and markets, and in all their casual intercourse with men, as well as in the pulpit, they earnestly recommended that apostolical Christianity which so fervently glowed in their own hearts. Amidst their arduous labours, and without any diminution of their zeal, some of them, by a self-denying redemption and diligent improvement of their time, acquired a respectable share of learning ; most of them were mighty in the Scriptures, able divines, zealous preachers, intrepid and successful reformers of a faithless and degenerate people." *

The doctrines which these men of God preached were strictly orthodox, derived from the pure Fountain of eternal truth ; they were a revival of the obsolete doctrines of the Reformation, by which this nation was rescued from the tyranny, the darkness and superstition of the papal heresy ; and were contained in the Articles and Homilies of our venerable Establishment, but, through the unfaithfulness of the clergy, were generally unknown to the people of this country : hence, we may remark, in passing, that the subject, as well as the manner, of the preaching of our fathers, had in it the power and attrac-

* See the author's Sermon preached before the Conference in Bristol, 1838, and published at their request.



tion of novelty. Not one in a thousand of their hearers had ever before listened to a discourse upon any of those saving truths which formed the common topics of their ministry.

The imputed guilt and inherent depravity in which the first transgression of the progenitors of our race involved all their posterity, commonly called "original sin," was stated, not as an hypothesis to be proved by philosophical argument, but as a revealed truth of God confirmed by universal experience; and this, in connexion with the aggravated condemnation which every individual has incurred, by his actual violations of the divine law, was set forth in strains of bold and fervent appeal to the conscience: the ungodly man was made to trace the foul streams of iniquity which flowed through his life, back to the impure fountain of a corrupt heart, which he brought into the world with him. These preachers knew well how to make the law pierce the sinner's conscience, and compel him to cry out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" By the strictness and spirituality of that law they searched the heart, as with the resistless beams of the sun; and thousands of their hearers were astounded with the fact, that these mysterious strangers, whom till that moment they had never seen, whose characters until then they had despised, should know, as it seemed to them, their whole history, and even the deep and untold secrets of their minds. Many retired from their sermons saying, in effect, "Come and see the men who have told us all that ever we did. Are they not the servants of Jesus Christ?"

The nature of true repentance, as well as the fruit meet for it, was defined with an explicitness which the most ignorant could not easily mistake; and its immediate and indispensable necessity was enforced with an energy which the most obdurate found it difficult to resist. Heralds of Immanuel, they cried aloud everywhere,

"The kingdom of heaven is at hand ; repent, and believe the gospel." The terrors of a sin-offended Deity were unveiled to the view of alarmed multitudes, who were made to feel "the wrath of God hanging over their heads every moment ;" hell from beneath was moved to meet them at their coming, and, trembling on its verge, they were, with weeping earnestness, exhorted to flee from the eternal death which threatened them. The last great day of judgment was so graphically described that rude and volatile crowds were often awed to solemn silence ; and many who came to mock, remained to pray. These sons of thunder brought those distant objects near, and their congregations might well almost imagine that they heard the sound of the great archangel's trumpet, saw the dead arising from their graves, beheld the great white throne in the heavens, and an assembled universe listening to their individual trial for eternity. Whatever was their theme, they possessed the power of investing it with present interest and importance : whether they spoke of salvation or destruction, it was felt to be at hand. Here, allow me to remark, that this style of preaching has always preceded great revivals of religion : "The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." God put the world under the "ministration of condemnation," for many ages before the "ministration of glory" succeeded ; as he dealt with mankind, so he deals with the individual : a man must be made sensible of the majesty, the purity, and justice of God, against whom he has rebelled ; he must rightly appreciate the glory which he has lost, feel the misery in which he has involved himself, groan beneath the load of guilt which he has incurred, deprecate the fearful penalty to which he has rendered himself liable, that he may be conducted to the throne of the heavenly grace, and hear with joy the publication of mercy through the all-prevalent atonement.

The fathers of our Israel were no less skilful, or prompt,



in applying the healing balm to the wounded heart; they made haste to lead the self-despairing, contrite sinner, from the terrors of Mount Sinai, to the expiatory sacrifice of Calvary. There was a melting tenderness, a moving sympathy, a delightful eloquence of nature and grace combined, in the manner in which these heaven-inspired men proclaimed to those whose souls the sword of the Spirit had pierced, as they lay weltering in their blood: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" "Save them from going down to the pit, there is a ransom for them!" Justification by faith alone in the sacrificial death of Christ, was the most prominent theme in their ministry; and they possessed an almost unexampled ability in explaining and enforcing the gospel method of believing in order to a present pardon. The direct witness of the Holy Spirit to the fact of adoption, was exhibited as an immediate gracious consequence of pardon, and insisted upon as the common privilege of true believers in Christ. They considered it just as much the office of the Holy Spirit to record his testimony of adoption in the heart of the believer, as to convince the world of sin; to heal the contrite, as to wound the impenitent: and hence the seals of their ministry realized that kingdom of God which consists "in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

The nature and necessity, the fruit and marks, of regeneration by the same Spirit, were explained and applied in language which carried conviction to the hearts of myriads, and made those whose religion before consisted merely in doing no harm to their neighbours, and in giving every man his due, feel themselves in the condition of the man at the marriage feast, to whom the king said, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?" and he was speechless. The great and solemn truth embodied in that well-known stanza,—

"I must for faith incessant cry,
 And wrestle, Lord, with thee ;
 I must be born again, or die
 To all eternity,"

was proclaimed through the length and breadth of the land, as with a voice of thunder ; and though some of their hearers, in surprise, exclaimed, " How can these things be ? " and then with indifference or prejudice turned aside and heard them no more, numbers believed their word, to whom was " given power to become the sons of God ; " and they " were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

These devoted messengers of the truth were taught to regard Christianity as a pure and undefiled religion, designed to make men as holy and happy as it is possible for redeemed creatures to be whilst in a state of probation ; hence they ceaselessly urged upon those that had believed, to leave the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on to perfection. The nature, the means, and the evidences of entire sanctification, were held forth in the terms of Scripture ; and all who had obtained peace with God were strongly and constantly exhorted, not to stop short of a complete purification from all the defilement of sin, and a full renovation of the soul into the moral image of God ; which they were called to evidence by uniform and universal obedience to the moral law.

I do not pretend to have brought before you, this day, the complete system of doctrine preached by our fathers : theirs was the whole orthodox faith held by the church of Christ from the beginning. I have selected those vital and peculiar truths which distinguished their ministry, and which, after long and general neglect, they were specially called to revive. Permit me further to add, that to these saving truths the successors of those holy men have strictly adhered. No deviation from them has

ever been tolerated in any of our ministers ; and no preaching has been respectably or permanently popular in our congregations, which has not been characterized by a prominent exhibition and zealous enforcement of those primary articles of the Christian faith, by which our fathers were mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan. Through their ministry multitudes of our countrymen were reclaimed from abandoned wickedness, rescued from a semi-barbarous ignorance, and made useful members of civil and religious society ; thousands of families were raised from indigence and poverty to comfort, and not a few to the enjoyment of wealth.

The good effects of their labours were rendered permanent, and the societies which they raised were well organized, by the establishment and exercise of a scriptural discipline over them. The Wesleyan polity has commanded the admiration of wise and good men of all parties ; and we feel no hesitation in affirming, that, as a whole, it is in strict accordance with the principles and constitution of a Christian church, as they may be fairly inferred from the writings of the New Testament. Whether we regard the qualifications required from the candidates for our ministry, the manner in which they are brought into it, and, after due probation, set apart to the sacred office ; whether we regard the number, order, and employment of the subordinate officers in our society ; whether we consider the ample means which our economy supplies to all our members, for the mutual fellowship of the saints ; or the terms of admission to membership with us ; we are firmly persuaded, that it approaches as near to the design of Christ in the institution of a church on earth, as any form of ecclesiastical government which has existed either in ancient or modern times. It invests the minister with the chief responsibility to the great Head of the church for its peace, purity, and increase ; but it does not wrest from

him the power to discharge the functions requisite for the attainment of those objects : it does not deposit the pastor's authority in the hands of other men ; but it places it under suitable checks and guards in his own ; it creates a just balance of power between the ministers and lay-officers, so as to render abuse difficult on either side ; and it furnishes the private members with a safe guarantee for the continued enjoyment of all their religious privileges, so long as they walk by our rules : those rules, though brief, are full of meaning ; they are a collection of Christian precepts, comprising an epitome of man's religious, social, and civil duties. He that observes them will make it his first care, to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling ; but he will also be a devout member of the church, a peaceable and an obedient subject of the realm, an honest tradesman, a diligent and faithful servant, a just and generous master ; an affectionate husband, a good parent, ruling well his own house ; or a dutiful child, obeying his parents in all things in the Lord.

The Wesleyan Methodists have, from their commencement, maintained an anti-sectarian spirit and character. We are not Dissenters, in the legal, nor even in the popular, sense of that term : we do not hold the dissenting notion of the unlawfulness of a state Establishment : we rather regard a scripturally-constituted church,—and such, as a whole, we believe the Church of England is in her doctrine and discipline,—placed by law at the head of a nation, as a good to be upheld, and not an evil to be overthrown. Neither are we Seceders, in the sense in which that term has been applied to certain separatists from the Church of Scotland : they went out from their original communion in a body, on the ground of alleged grievances to which they thought they could no longer conscientiously submit : we never thus seceded. No church was ever robbed or rent asunder to form ours. We are “a people who were not a people.” The ele-

ments of our original societies consisted of persons gathered out of the mass of ungodly men who strayed over the desert wastes of neglected Britain, without either fold or shepherd: they belonged to no church, and they made no profession of religion, except that they called themselves Christians, by way of distinction from Jews, Turks, and infidels. A few moral church-going persons joined these early societies; but they remained in the Establishment. Hundreds of profligate persons, reclaimed from their vicious practices, afterwards became regular communicants at her altars, and some became ministers and members of other communions. We have increased, and not diminished, the numbers of the different Christian denominations with which we are surrounded. Many individuals, from time to time, have peaceably withdrawn from us, and risen to respectability and influence in other sections of the catholic church of Jesus Christ; but exceedingly few have crossed their boundaries to join us: and we do not wish it; we would avoid the very appearance, as well as the spirit and practice, of proselytism. We have hewn many out of the rock, who have become polished stones, whom other builders have set in the temple of our God. Be it so: we enjoy the high satisfaction of knowing that we have not entered upon other men's labours. Our neighbours cannot say to us, "We have laid the foundation, and you have built thereon."

It is true, we exist in a state of virtual, unsought, and even shunned, yet unavoidable, separation from the national Church; but after all the unmerited obloquy which some of her haughty and mistaken sons have cast upon us, we cherish for her a filial affection, and are decidedly hostile to the designs of those who cry, "Raze it, raze it to the ground." A few narrow-minded and uncharitable men, who dwell within the pale of the Establishment, may continue to impute motives to us by which we are conscious to ourselves we are not

actuated, and to treat us with invective and reproach, to which our conduct gives no just occasion; yet we have reason to believe, that the most pious and intelligent of her communion entertain towards us none but kindly Christian feelings; and were it otherwise, distinguishing between the system and the men, we will persevere, treading in the footsteps of our revered Founder, doing all we can to prevent the overthrow of that noble fabric which, to his latest hour, he loved and supported; and should the period ever arrive when England's destinies shall be swayed by any other than a Christian Protestant government, by law established, we trust it will never be said, that the Wesleyans were quiescent parties to such a revolution. Mr. Wesley has taught us to consider ourselves as a people raised up, in the order of divine Providence, to spread scriptural Christianity in the world; and to this we have vowed to consecrate all our energies. "Holiness to the Lord," is our motto; and the gathering together a community is deemed of importance only as it contributes to that end. This is our great connexional object; and in the prosecution of it, all the talents of wealth, influence, intelligence, and piety, with which the Lord has entrusted us, are put in requisition; and, by his blessing crowning the whole, the aggregate result of spiritual good has, hitherto at least, equalled our reasonable expectations.

Another marked feature in our public character is our abstinence from political faction and party strife. Our history is before the world; we have existed through periods of great national disturbance and danger; but we may boldly demand of our enemies themselves, "Have we not been a peaceable people?" Those inspired injunctions, "Fear God, and honour the king;" and, "Meddle not with them that are given to change;" have been our statute-laws as a Connexion; and, amidst the menacing commotions which have agitated the country, our societies, with very few exceptions, true to their prin-

ciples, have pursued one undeviating course of scriptural loyalty, and peaceful subjection to "the powers that be." Whilst, in some critical periods of our country's history, many in the middle and lower orders of societies, with whom our people were in immediate connexion, moving in the same circles, pursuing the same callings, and having a common public interest, have joined the ranks of disaffection, in attempts essentially to change, or actually to overthrow, our admirable constitution; the members of our community have retired far from these scenes of strife and disorder, remembering that their special vocation was to extend His spiritual empire who has said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight."

The occasional schisms which have occurred in our body, supply the most painful passages of its history. These have injured us more than the brutal persecution which assailed our fathers, and more than all the voluminous abuse, misrepresentation, and slander, which certain portions of the press have poured upon their sons. Our divisions have, generally, been caused by a few men of popular consequence in our larger societies; their pretensions have assumed an air of plausibility; zeal for the church's purity has been their avowed motive, and useful reforms in our economy their ostensible objects. But the issue has, in most cases, made it manifest, that their real design was to become the head of a party; and although they have succeeded in drawing after them, not only men of their own views, but sincere and unsuspecting persons, over whom they or their partisans had acquired a previous influence, their divisive schemes have ultimately failed; they and their families have often had cause bitterly to regret such ill-advised steps; not a few of those whom they misled have been scattered and lost in the world, and their attempts to mend our system have turned out to be retrograde

movements; whilst the original Connexion, as if it had thrown off an incubus, has proceeded with accelerated speed in its career of usefulness, augmenting its numbers by thousands, and taking a firmer hold upon the affections of the myriads of its friends.

We regret these schisms; but they are not singular: if we examine ecclesiastical history, we shall find no narrative of any great revival which has not had its reputation tarnished by them. It is a remarkable fact, that in all seasons of signal outpourings of the Spirit, some of those who seemed to catch the hallowed flame, and "partake the glorious bliss," have afterwards either run into extravagant errors, or been puffed up with pride, affecting high degrees of spirituality, and condemning others as carnal. Such blemishes were in the apostolic churches, and there is scarcely an Epistle in the New Testament which does not allude to them. One of the seven deacons who was considered by the church in Jerusalem as a man full of the Holy Ghost, and for that reason chosen to office, afterwards became the head of a sect, in hostility to the apostles; and in the Apocalypse our Lord declares his displeasure against that sect and its doings: "But this thou hast," says He that liveth and was dead, "that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." There were moreover the Gnostics, who sprang up in the times of the apostles, and led away not a few from the primitive fold: several similar sects appeared at the time of the glorious Protestant Reformation, and some of the leaders of those sects had been, for a while, highly esteemed by the first Reformers. Thus it was in the early days of Methodism; the first person who received the sanction of Mr. Wesley, as a lay-preacher, turned against him, called him "Pope," spread false reports concerning him, divided the original society, at the old Foundery; formed the spiritual children of his father in Christ into an independent church of which he became the minister.

Similar events have transpired in later periods. Let us learn the moral of them, from the lips of apostles: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God." "Mark them which cause divisions among you, contrary to the doctrine which you have received, and avoid them."

After this brief and imperfect review of our history, it is proper that I should remind you of some of the duties which devolve upon us at this religious and joyous celebration.

The occasion calls us to special exercises of gratitude and praise. Let us reflect for a moment on what might have been our condition, as families and individuals, but for the benefits which this great revival has conferred upon us. Some of us are Wesleyans of the second or third generation; what were our immediate ancestors when its influence reached to them? Were they not strangers to true religion, "walking according to the course of this world?" and would they not, in all human probability, have passed away to the grave without any well-grounded hope of a happy immortality, had it not been for the ministry which we enjoy? And is it not equally probable, that we their descendants would have followed their example; and, having spent our lives in thoughtless neglect of religion, gone down to the chambers of death unprepared to meet our eternal Judge? The messengers of truth, of whom I have spoken, carried glad tidings into the vicinities of the dwellings of our progenitors; and they were turned from darkness to light, and from Satan to God. Being created anew in Christ Jesus, and sanctified by the word, they became bright patterns of Christian holiness, taught us to walk in wisdom's ways, finished their course with joy, and are now ascribing "salvation to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever." How delightful the recollection that our parents walked with God and are now in his blissful presence; and how thankful

should we be for that light which led them from the mazes of error and sin into the paths of life ! Do we owe nothing to that system of doctrine and discipline which God employed for their awakening, conversion, edification, and eternal salvation ? Often did they say, to us, their children, " O come and taste and see how good the Lord is ! " They led us to the house of God, and taught us to love the ministers, the ordinances, the citizens of our spiritual Zion ; their admonitions, instructions, and prayers have proved effectual, and now we are treading in the path which conducted them to glory. Some of you are not the offspring of religious parents, and this revival found you without a guide or spiritual instructor. " No man cared for your soul. " But He whose ever-watchful eye is upon the wandering sons of men, brought you, " by a way which you knew not, " into our part of the fold of Christ ; and here, under the care of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, you have been led forth to feed " in green pastures, and to lie down by still waters. " What peace and joy have you obtained by believing ! What divine consolations have been ministered unto you through the medium of our ordinances ! and what a beneficial effect has your union with this section of the church of Christ had upon your domestic and worldly interests, as well as upon your spiritual comforts ! When you survey these acts of divine goodness, with devout gratitude you exclaim, " Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits ! "

The advantages of Wesleyan Methodism, in a national point of view, demand from us a tribute of praise. We tremble at the thought of what might, before this time, have been the fate of our country, but for this, or, in its absence, some other means of moral reformation. The infidelity and democracy which have overthrown many ancient dynasties on the continent of Europe, were fast undermining the civil and religious institutions of

Great Britain; a prosperous commerce was introducing unrestrained luxury and extravagance of living, when God raised up, through the instrumentality of the Wesleys, a ministry, which has proved a strong barrier against the spread of scepticism in the middle classes of society, and has exerted an influence over the dense population in our manufacturing districts, which has operated as the chief cause of the preservation of public peace in seasons of great excitement and alarm. It is not exceeding the bounds of truth to presume, that, but for the counteracting agency of that revival of religion which began with our fathers, the peasantry of England would have been as much prepared for anarchy and revolution as those of any of the continental nations, in which the most revolting scenes of insurrection and bloodshed have transpired. Who, I ask, have been the chief instruments of defeating the designs of infidel demagogues and political revolutionists, among the middle and lower orders of society in this country, for the last fifty years? When itinerant orators have been running to and fro in the land, inciting the poor to deeds of faction and rebellion; and, by the dissemination of cheap literature, spreading far and wide their libertine and revolutionary principles; what class of public men have, by their open and undaunted resistance, been more than any other the objects of their ire? Whom have their official journals most abused as the enemies of their plans? Let recorded facts give the answer. If England has not been made to drink of the cup of the Lord's indignation, which has been put into the hands of her continental neighbours, we owe our exemption as much to the piety and prayers of the thousands of God's Israel, as to the wisdom of our government, the vigilance of our magistrates, or the strength of our arms. "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah;" small indeed would that

remnant have been, had the gracious visitation in which we now rejoice been withheld.

We are called by this day's solemnities to acts of deep humiliation before God, on account of our great unfaithfulness. We have failed to make a due improvement of the peculiar favour which he has manifested towards us. Zeal for the doctrine of present and immediate remission of sins, by faith in the atonement, and of the direct witness of the Spirit as the privilege of all believers, has distinguished us; but not a few of our people are living without the actual enjoyment of these spiritual blessings. A considerable portion of one very interesting class among us, the children of Methodist families, I fear, stop short of this state of grace: they are moral in their conduct, amiable in their disposition and manners, attentive to divine ordinances, warmly attached to our system, respectful and affectionate to their ministers, but they do not restlessly aspire to all that comfort and purity which would result from knowing, that God, for Christ's sake, has blotted out their sins, and daily walking in the unclouded light of his countenance. We earnestly contend, that it is the privilege of all believers to be "sanctified wholly," in the present life, and preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord; but, comparatively, how few of us clearly experience, or habitually exemplify, that exalted attainment! Pious persons of other denominations expect to be purified from all sin, and made meet for heaven, in the article of death; we hold, that we may enjoy and manifest "perfect love" amid the busy scenes of life; but, practically, we seem to regard it as some distant object of hope to be realized at an indefinite future period.

Our admirable economy affords peculiar advantages for Christian fellowship: our weekly class-meetings, especially, are means by which the members of our society may minister to each other's comfort and edification, by mutual sympathy, exhortation, and prayer; and

thus effectually promote all the great ends of the communion of saints : and yet a large mass of our constant hearers do not avail themselves of these excellent prudential and auxiliary means for working out their salvation ; and many whose names are enrolled in our society's lists are very irregular in their attendance. Our week-day services might be much more numerous frequented than they are ; and when there is an increase of spirituality among us, worldly engagements will not be so often urged as reasons of absence : the wealthier and better-educated of our members should take a more active part in our prayer-meetings than they have hitherto been in the habit of doing ; and surely if those who have to labour with their hands for the bread which perishes, can find time for these holy exercises in the intervals of the sabbath, gratitude should constrain those on whose tabernacle the candle of the Lord hath shined, to join their poorer brethren in these free-will offerings of praise to the Father of mercies.

The biography of pious persons who have lived and died in our Connexion, presents us with many illustrious examples, deserving of our steadfast imitation : but we have fallen far short of these noble witnesses for Christ ; the general standard of piety is much below what it should be with such eminent patterns before us. We have not sedulously emulated their holy love, their fervent devotion, their habitual self-denial, their heavenly-mindedness, deep humility, burning zeal, their lively and working faith. God has greatly blessed us in our exertions to spread his truth both at home and in foreign lands ; but our usefulness might have been multiplied, had we been as united, benevolent, zealous, and laborious as some of our predecessors were. What a people for number, eminent holiness, and successful exertions to bless mankind, might we now have been, had we fully answered the designs of God in the distinguished favour which he has conferred upon us ! And shall we not this

day mingle tears of contrition and self-abasement with our ascriptions of joy and praise ?

It becomes us at this Centenary celebration to renew our allegiance to this good cause. We have attached ourselves to it, upon conviction that it is the cause of God. I do not mean this expression to convey an exclusory or invidious self-adulation, but simply that Methodism is an important and favoured department of that great work of moral renovation which God, by his universal church, is now carrying on in the world. Our system has stood the test of one hundred years' experience ; and never did any human contrivance pass through a more severe or protracted ordeal. Had it not been based upon the imperishable truth of God, it would long ago have been demolished by the assaults of its foes from without, or consumed by the fires of contention which have raged within its inclosures : it has been purified by the latter, and consolidated by the former ; it has outlived the fierce, combined, and reiterated efforts which have been made for its overthrow ; and there never was a period when its friends of every grade, rich and poor, were more united among themselves, or more zealously devoted to the promotion of our great connexional interests, than in this our Centenary year. We enjoy a profound and universal peace ; our prospects at home are very cheering ; our openings in the foreign field are beyond our means of supply ; God is crowning our labours with encouraging success ; and what may be the glorious events of our second Century, none can predict ; we will not have the vanity to fear that our successors will be less faithful, or less laborious, than we have been. One hundred years ago there was a single class, consisting of twelve or fourteen persons, in this immense city, like a drop of the bucket in the midst of the ocean ; thirty-eight years after that time, when Mr. Wesley laid the foundation-stone of this sacred edifice, there were one hundred and fifty-four preachers ; thirty-eight thou-

sand, two hundred and seventy-four members in society : on the occasion to which I refer, that apostolic man, in the review of the great things which his eyes had witnessed, joyfully exclaimed, "What hath God wrought!" Now there are, at least, twenty-four annual Conferences ; there are four thousand nine hundred and fifty-seven regular Ministers ; one million one hundred and twelve thousand five hundred and nineteen members in society, and besides these, not less than three millions of stated hearers of our ministry. Is it a mere ebullition of enthusiastic feeling, or is it a rational exercise of Christian hope, to anticipate that the events of the next century will be as wonderful and glorious as those of the last ? Judging of the future by the past, is it unreasonable to entertain a persuasion, that before another Centenary our beloved Connexion may have its Conferences in continental India, perhaps, in China, in the islands of the South Seas, in Africa, and in our West India colonies, as they are now spread over the United States of America ?

With these facts and prospects before us, what remains, my brethren, but that we, on this glad day, renew our determination to "walk by the same rule, and mind the same things," which our fathers so happily observed ? Let us seek from above a double portion of that spirit of piety and devotion which so fervently glowed in them. Let us maintain the truth in all its simplicity and energy, as it was committed to us by holy men of God, resisting every attempt to introduce any new doctrine amongst us, from whatever quarter it may proceed ; let us repel every effort to change or subvert that excellent discipline which has, from the beginning, been of pre-eminent advantage to our societies ; drive from your borders the demon of discord, in whatever guise he may make his approach ; listen to no insinuations against your ministers, but "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake, and be at peace among yourselves." Have as little to do as possible

with the strifes of men; you may acquaint yourselves, as you have opportunity, with the state of public affairs, and, in a manner becoming your Christian profession, exercise all the rights with which the law of the land enfranchises you, without imbibing a political spirit. Short of positive sin, there are not many things more injurious to personal piety, than the temper of party politics: it engenders anger, debate, and contention; destroys spirituality of mind, obstructs the exercise of brotherly love, interrupts the peace of families, and brings its victims into unprofitable and dangerous associations, which, in some instances, have terminated in "shipwreck of faith, and a good conscience." Retire far from the arena of strife, leave to the men who have their portion on earth the unhallowed struggles of worldly ambition, and with immovable resolution attend to the nobler objects of your Christian vocation. Be true to your religious principles, and zealous for the prosperity of our own denomination; but exercise a liberal and catholic spirit towards those who differ from you. Sectarian selfishness is at variance with the genius of Wesleyan Methodism; if you act up to its spirit and design, you will find no time to proselyte members of other evangelical churches, but you will find that all your time is too short for the purpose of bringing to Christ the crowds around you who are hastening to destruction. Let your piety be illustrated in all your civil, social, and domestic relations: rule well your own houses; be upright and honourable in all your dealings; sober and temperate in your habits; strict in your observance of the sabbath; industrious in your secular callings, "diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

Employ all the means at your command to promote the salvation of the souls of men; embrace occasional and incidental seasons, which may occur in the transaction of worldly business, to recommend religion; invite

the careless to the house of God ; and when serious impressions are produced upon their minds, tell them of the fellowship of believers, and give them the affectionate invitation which Moses addressed to Hobab : " Come thou with us and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Support by your talents and property all our charitable and pious institutions ; they have for their objects the relief of suffering humanity, and the release of the spiritual captive from the bonds of iniquity : " Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering." These, brethren, are duties which especially belong to us as members of a religious community, which exists for the purpose of spreading vital godliness to the ends of the earth ; to these great purposes let us continue to apply our undivided energies, and the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of our Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and a smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night ; and upon all this glory shall be a defence.

" May the Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times as many more as ye are, and bless you as he hath promised you." Amen.

THE END.